

YAHOO! NEWS

IBM's Watson to assist doctors

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Dr. Watson will see you now.

Watson, the television game show-playing supercomputer from IBM, is teaming up with health insurer WellPoint to assist medical professionals in diagnosing and treating patients.

IBM and WellPoint said Monday it will be the first commercial application for the computer which defeated two human champions on the popular television game show "Jeopardy!" in February.

"Watson is expected to serve as a powerful tool in the physician's decision making process," they said.

IBM and WellPoint, which has 34 million members, said they will "develop and launch Watson-based solutions to help improve patient care through the delivery of up-to-date, evidence-based health care for millions of Americans."

"Jeopardy!" tests a player's knowledge in a range of categories, from geography to politics to history to sports and entertainment.

Watson, which understands spoken language, played the game by crunching through multiple algorithms at dizzying speed and attaching a percentage score to what it believed was the correct response.

"Watson's ability to analyze the meaning and context of human language, and quickly process vast amounts of information to suggest options targeted to a patient's circumstances, can assist decision makers, such as physicians and nurses, in identifying the most likely diagnosis and treatment options for their patients," IBM and WellPoint said.

Watson, named after IBM founder Thomas Watson, can rifle through 200 million pages of data and provide precise responses in just seconds.

"Using this extraordinary capability WellPoint is expected to enable Watson to allow physicians to easily coordinate medical data programmed into Watson with specified patient factors, to help identify the most likely diagnosis and treatment options in complex cases," IBM and WellPoint said.

"We envision that new applications will allow physicians to use Watson to consult patient medical histories, recent test results, recommended treatment protocols and the latest research findings loaded into Watson to discuss the best and most effective courses of treatment with their patients," they said.

WellPoint said it expects to begin employing Watson technology in early 2012 in clinical pilots with selected physician groups.

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